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# CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN AFRICAN CULTURES

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## 13. *Economic Change and Mossi Acculturation*

Some five thousand Mossi from the kingdom of Yatenga in the Upper Volta have been resettled on the newly developed lands of the Niger Irrigation Project in the French Sudan. Removed from a cultural setting which has been relatively undisturbed by the influence of European civilization, they are required to adapt themselves rapidly to an economic situation structured and directed by Europeans. Economic organization being the variable involved, a study of their adjustment provides an opportunity to examine some of the cultural problems and processes related to economic development in underdeveloped areas.

Yatenga is the northernmost of four Mossi kingdoms located in the Upper Volta. It is a sub-Saharan savanna land of red earth, low rainfall, gently rolling plains, and low hills. Ouahigouya, the capital, gives its name to the French administrative unit, the Cercle de Ouahigouya, which has governed the kingdom from its headquarters in this ancient city since its conquest in 1895.[1]

To distinguish themselves from the people of the neighboring kingdoms of Ouagadougou, Fada-N'Gourma, and Tenkodogo, the Mossi of the Yatenga sometimes speak of themselves as "Yadise" (those of Yadiga). This name refers to the fact that they regard themselves as being descended, as a nation, from Naba Yadiga, the half-mythical warrior-prince from Ouagadougou who broke away from his father's dynasty to form the separate political entity, Yatenga, which bears his name (*ya* for "Yadiga" and *tenga* for "country"). The Mossi have not always been numerically and culturally dominant in the Yatenga, as they are today. They recognize that their ancestors came from the south, from Mamprusi and Dagomba in the northern territories of Ghana.

Highly organized politico-religious states representing the cultural amalgamation of native and foreign populations and institutions are characteristic of the Voltaic region of West Africa. Acknowledging that we "owe to Rattray the discovery that these central Voltaic tribes are

[1] Capitaine Noire, *Monographie du Cercle de Ouahigouya* (Ouahigouya, 1904), p. 15.

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composed of two major groups of communities," Fortes goes on to describe this pattern succinctly:

> On the one side are those that claim to be descendants of immigrants from parts of the country other than their present habitats. On the other side are communities that claim to be the autochthonous inhabitants. . . . Many of the immigrant communities claim descent from forbears of the Mampuru ruling stock. Though now wholly amalgamated with the alleged aboriginal inhabitants, they have certain ritual observances and a system of chieftainship similar to those of the Mamprusi. . . . The institution distinctive of the autochthonous communities is the office of "Custodian of the Earth." This ritual office, involving priestly functions in connection with the cult of the Earth, is found among many West African peoples from the Senegal to the mouth of the Niger. In the Voltaic region it is the exclusive prerogative of the autochthonous communities.[2]

The inhabitants of the Yatenga at the time of the arrival of the Mossi were the Kurumankobe, or Fulse, as they are called by the Mossi. Their descendants recognize their indigenous origin but have become almost wholly acculturated to the Mossi. While most Mossi bear the sib name Wedraogo and maintain political control in the Yatenga, the descendants of the Kurumankobe usually have the sib name Savadogo and are excluded from the exercise of political authority. They have retained the custodianship of the earth, and the elders of their lineages and sibs are the Mossi's *Tenga Soba namba*, their "earth custodians," charged with propitiating the supernatural forces of nature.

## POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The present king of the Yatenga, the *Yatenga Naba*, is a lineal descendant of the first ruler, Naba Yadiga. The members of the lineage of the king are called "those who maintain themselves upon us" (*riim namba*). Directly subordinate to the authority of the Yatenga Naba are his four grand ministers, each of whom has authority over a particular province (*solum*) of the Yatenga.[3]

The province over which each of the grand ministers presides as lord is divided up into a number of cantons (*tense*), each of which is ruled by a chief who is the central political authority both of the village in which he resides and of the villages within the canton. Like the province, the concept of the canton is not precisely territorial. Some villages may owe

[2] Meyer Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 6.

[3] These provinces refer not only to geographical areas of the kingdom but to particular categories of the population. For example, the *Balum Naba* has direct authority over the southern regions of the Yatenga and indirect authority over the cantons of Riziam and Zittenga, political entities which have never fully recognized the central authority of the *Yatenga Naba*. This same minister is also especially charged with maintaining liaison with certain of the more important earth custodians throughout the Yatenga.

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their allegiance directly to the *Yatenga Naba* for historical reasons or because their chiefs are related to the royal lineage and superior within the social hierarchy to the local nobility (*nakomse*) to which the canton chiefs belong.

Subordinate, in turn, to the canton chief, is the village chief (*Tenga Naba*), who is the central authority in the aggregation of "quarters" (*saktse*) of which a Mossi village is composed. These quarters are the dwellings of patrilineal extended families and lineages (*boodoose*). Such a residence is called a *saka* if it contains the house of the lineage elder (*sak kasama*) or a *yiri* if it represents only a junior segment. In either case the dwelling of the oldest male in the group is surrounded by the separate houses of his wives, his younger brothers and their wives, and his sons, nephews, cousins, and their wives and children. Each adult individual has a separate house within the *saka*.

The smallest unit within the residence of the lineage is the nuclear family (*zaka*) composed of a man, his wife, and their children. If a man has more than one wife, the term *zaka pedere* (*zaka* half) may be used when the man's relationship with one of his several wives is being considered. He himself is called *zaka soba*. As a young man's family grows, each of his new wives is provided with a house adjoining his. In addition to his house and the houses of his wives, each man's household contains several granaries used to store the produce from the millet fields he has been assigned by his lineage. It is with the members of his own household that a man is in most frequent social and economic interaction. The fields he works with their assistance are the principal source of the food supply for the nuclear family unit.

The *yiri* is the next largest social unit within the *saka*. The term refers to the extended family dwelling inhabited by a man, his wives, his male children, and their wives and children. It may be composed of as many as fifteen separate nuclear families. While its inhabitants usually consist of the married sons of an older man and their nuclear families, it may also be composed of a man, his wife and children, and his younger brothers and their wives and children. Since its members are closely related within the lineage, there is greater social and economic interaction among them than there is with the other lineage members. As the *zaka soba* is the principal and final authority within the *zaka*, the *yiri soba* is most important within the *yiri*.

Composed of the nuclear and extended family dwellings of its members, the Mossi residential unit is typically inhabited by all of the local representatives of the sib. In addition to the dwelling of the lineage elder, it contains the altar (*kiemserogo*) where the ancestral spirits of the lineage are worshiped. The lineage elder has authority over everyone living within his *saka*. As counselor to the village chief and intermediary with

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the ancestral spirits, he is the principal political and religious authority within his lineage.

The single term *boodoo* is used to refer to three separate groups: the sib, the lineage, and the local residential kin group described above. Aside from formalized recognition of patrilineal descent and inheritance, the lineage functions most significantly as a local residential kin group in which the economic and social participation of the female non-members is as important as that of the men. Although the men are most prominent in the direction of its affairs, their wives have a considerable, if somewhat indirect, effect upon decisions made. Even in the relationship of the members of the lineage to their ancestral spirits (*kiemse*), the women play an important part in preparing the food and the libations to be offered. They give birth to the members of the lineage, nourish them until weaning (usually at the age of two), and provide them with guidance and training for their ascribed roles. In the education of the female members of the lineage the wives play a more important part than the men. But it is in their economic activities that the significance of the women's role is best seen. In addition to their farm work, they co-operate fully in repairing roofs, flooring the courtyards, and even assisting in the brick-making which precedes house-building. The economic and social contribution of the wives is of equal importance with that of the husbands and sons, and it is more important than that of the daughters, since females born into the lineage marry and leave just as they become fully productive members of their fathers' households.

Daughters, however, serve their lineage in a different way. As they are successful in winning for themselves a good name in the households of their husbands, so the bond of economic and social co-operation established between the two lineages at the time of marriage is strengthened. When they mature, they return to assist the members of their lineage with ritual obligations to the ancestors. If they are left childless at their husband's death, they may return to their father's household to reside.

Separated from one another by millet fields and the public way, the dwelling of each Mossi kin group has the appearance of a small walled village. Each round mud house with its thatched roof has a separate courtyard which is usually contiguous to the courtyards of the other houses in the residential unit of which it is a part. The individual dwellings are constructed in such a way—the wall of each house or courtyard being contiguous to that of the nearest neighbor—as to form a circular wall whose exterior is closed at all but two points. The dwelling of each kin group has a small exit and a large open entrance way just within which is located a thatch-covered sun shelter (*zande*) where the men of the lineage gather to rest, to work at small crafts, and to talk. Guests are

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342 592 [264] received, gossip exchanged, and social and ceremonial obligations discussed in its shade. Here also, the men of the lineage take their meals, brought out to them from the kitchens of their wives and set before them by their sons, who first attend their fathers and then dine on what remains.

592 252 [512] A few paces away is the grinding platform (*nere*) where the women gather to prepare the grain for their families' meals. This great circular mud table, some twenty feet in diameter, is raised about three feet from the ground. Its surface is beaten hard and worked over with cinders and manure to make it rainproof. Each woman has her assigned place at this platform where she keeps her pestle and where she stations herself at dawn and again at dusk to grind her millet and learn the news of the day.

592 Frequently found at the outer perimeter of the dwelling of the Mossi kin group is the house of the son of a lineage woman who has returned from his father's household to live in the benevolent presence of his mother's family, with whom he enjoys an especially permissive relationship. The house set aside for the residence of the young unmarried men of the lineage is also located on the outer edge of the compound dwelling.

555 184 A recent addition to the traditional pattern of village organization described above is the independent households of socially ambitious individuals who have chosen to separate themselves from the residences of their lineages in order to profit from their own economic or religious enterprises. Many have become independently wealthy through successful commercial ventures; others, as a result of conversion to Islam, have gained prestige through religious authority and wealth through the tuition and services provided by the Koranic students. Often these people are much younger than their lineage elders, not in line for the inheritance of political or religious authority through traditional channels, and unwilling either to accept the authority of their seniors or to share economically with the less prosperous members of their lineages. They are deviants, in conflict with the communal patterns of consumption and with the emphasis on accepting established authority which characterizes the traditional social organization of the Mossi.

## THE TRADITIONAL ECONOMY

613 476 243 Much agricultural endeavor is necessarily co-operative. Each farmer is dependent on the assistance of his kinsmen to get his fields seeded, cultivated, and harvested in the short time during which each of these operations must take place. However, the yield from his field remains his own, to be shared only with his own wives and children. Members of the lineage also work in the fields under the specific control of the lineage elder. Although the harvest from these fields is stored in the granary

242 [i.e. at a sun shelter in the entrance-way. — Analyst]

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belonging to him, he can be relied upon to share with the members of the lineage if this should be necessary.

Capital goods in the form of houses, granaries, and fields are the property of the lineage. Individual rights are limited to temporary use and custodianship but are passed on to others when a general shift in residence and role follows the death of a senior member of the lineage. Although property is passed on in accordance with the rules of descent in the lineage, part of the property redistributed represents the product of the labor of the lineage as a consanguineal kin group. For, as has been indicated, the labor of the wives, who are not lineage members, is as important as that of their husbands and children.

The lineage head discusses the coming year with the other elders, and an over-all production plan is made out. They decide what fields are to be left fallow, what ones are to be planted to cotton and the varieties of millet, what lands may be used by individuals desiring to plant a cash crop, and what, if any, land may be loaned to neighboring lineages or to in-laws. With the approach of the first rains, all economically active men and women go to their fields to prepare them for planting, leaving behind in the village only the old people and the children who are still too small to assist in the fields or tend their fathers' animals.

A considerable portion of the land within the limits of a Mossi village is under the direct control of the village chief (*Tenga Naba*) and the earth custodian (*Tenga Soba*), the local representatives of political and supernatural authority. This land is used for the public way, for the market place, and for burial grounds and latrines. Except for that which is too poor for any purpose, all available land within several miles of a village is put under cultivation.

*Ki* is the generic name which the Mossi give to the millet, which is the basic product in their economy and which receives the largest single allocation of land and labor of any Mossi economic activity. Two kinds of millet are planted, a large-grained variety (*kenda*) and a small-grained variety (*basua*). Millet is the first crop to be planted after the rains have begun. Small- and large-grained millet seeds are frequently mixed and sown in the same field. Small-grained millet may also be sown in the same field with a white bean (*benga*). A "tired" field may be left fallow for five, ten, or fifteen years. When it is first replanted, it will be seeded to millet for the first three years. The fourth year it may again be put into millet, but if the previous crop was not good, cotton will be planted. Usually, a Mossi farmer plants cotton for two years, millet for three, then groundnuts, more cotton, then two more years of millet. It is believed that cotton renews the soil because of the intensive cultivation required: the earth is brought up into hillocks and turned over; after picking, the plant may be turned under and left to enrich the soil.

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241 picking, the plant may be turned under and left to enrich the soil.

241 476 Apart from the co-operative cultivation of fields under the proprietorship of the lineage elder, each farmer works for himself. He aids his relatives, and they in turn assist him with his work, but the results of their communal effort are not shared. This applies not only to the work of planting but also to cultivation and harvest. The decision about what is to be planted in a particular field and how it shall be cultivated rests finally with the individual farmer.

Communal or co-operative effort is much more characteristic of the work of cultivation than of the planting period, when everyone is in a hurry to get his own seeds into the ground and requests for assistance are [461] not welcomed. A strong note of competition is evident at this time. A man takes pride in his efficiency as a farmer, and there is a race to see who can get farthest along with his work. In the earliest phase of prepa- [572] rations for the approaching rainy season it is the individual's best friend upon whom he relies most for assistance. He is the first person to be called on for assistance in clearing the field for planting. If a Mossi farmer is unmarried, he may also ask the other unmarried men of his lineage for help. If a long day must be spent in the field in order to clear and clean it properly, his mother will offer the helpers the midday meal, which is carried out to them as they work.

622 651 241 *Naba koba* (chief's cultivation) is the name given to the work which the villagers do in the fields belonging to the village chief. A village elder is charged with announcing when and where work in the chief's fields is to be done, and each lineage head relays the news to his kinsmen. This contribution of labor is no longer obligatory, as it was formerly, but only [626] a question of social pressure and recognition that individual well-being and the welfare of the village "depend on the chief."

241 463 Every Mossi is an agriculturist. Although agriculture is the principal source of income, everyone also engages in crafts, particularly during the dry season when the work in the fields is finished. However, there are no full-time crafts specialists. Even the African functionaries in the European administration and the teachers, clerks, and merchants all work in their fields part of the time during the rainy season. The activities of the blacksmiths, leather workers, butchers, wood workers, herbalists, and small merchants are carried out on a much smaller scale and are fitted into the routine established by the rains and the growth of their millet. Only elders whose age keeps them from the fields might be thought of as specialists who do not participate in agriculture, but their land is worked by younger members of the family, and they take a keen interest in the course of its cultivation. The village chief, the earth custodian, and certain other elderly and important members of the community do not cultivate; this is because of their position and age rather than because

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they are so exclusively occupied with political or religious duties. In every case, they own fields and are dependent upon their produce for an important part of their subsistence.

Each Mossi village in the Yatenga holds a market every third day; markets operate in nearby villages on the intermediate days. There are few full-time merchants; men usually market their wares themselves and trade in items of European manufacture. Except for the sale of meat, it is a man's wives who sell farm produce. For marketing her husband's surplus millet, a woman receives a gift when the market closes.

Markets are most active in the early hours of the morning when meat and farm produce are fresh. By afternoon only a few merchants stay on, trying to sell their remaining produce to late-comers at greatly reduced prices. Social satisfactions derived from participation in the market are greatly valued; it provides an opportunity for meeting friends and kinsmen and for exchanging gossip and observations on one another's dress, the crops, and current political developments. The market is a place for making loans and receiving small gifts from kinsmen and friends, for flirtations and the arrangement of rendezvous, and for that casual sort of social interaction which is one of the principal pleasures of life in the Yatenga.

The Mossi farmer is dependent on the co-operation of the members of his lineage both for the success of his individual economic endeavor and for their support if his crop should fail. To be assured of this support, he must contribute generously to the maintenance of his position in the intricate network of rights and obligations which describes the relationship of the individual to his kin group. A constant exchange of visits and presents, ceremonial and economic assistance, and presence and participation in the affairs of the lineage are necessary to maintain his status within this group.

The nature of the social, economic, and emotional dependence of the individual on his kinsmen, his affinal relations, and his neighbors is such that his social well-being and economic success may properly be regarded as depending as much on his skill in manipulating this complex web of relationships as on his specifically economic endeavors. When a man decides to forego a second weeding of his fields in order to prepare presents and make the journey to the funeral of a kinsman, he is making a choice which, considered in the total context of the culture, is realistically in accord with his own economic best interest.

The farmer feels equally dependent on the deceased members of his lineage, the ancestral spirits (*kiemse*). If he feeds them a chicken, they may steal the soul from a neighboring stand of millet and bring it to enrich his own field. If properly treated, they can be depended upon to protect his shea nut trees from the high winds which might otherwise

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769 destroy the yield. And, depending on his attentions to them, they can give or take away the good health necessary to carry him through the arduous activity of the rainy season when work is hardest, the granaries nearly empty, and food in short supply. Separate ancestral spirits look out for different aspects of the well-being of the individual. Satisfying their various sacrificial requirements is both expensive and time-consuming, but their good will is essential to the success of the farmer, and it is in his own best interest to be attentive to their needs.

### THE EARTH CUSTODIANS

793 A close relationship exists between the control of the water supply
716 upon which the agricultural economy depends and the authority of the earth custodians in their role as intermediaries with the several manifestations of Wennam, the Mossi deity. The deity itself is somewhat aloof from the affairs of men, but through his specific manifestations and with the intercession of the earth custodians (*Tenga Soba namba*), descendants of the indigenous inhabitants of the Yatenga, the individual propitiates Wennam in order to control the various forces of the natural and supernatural environment upon which the success of his economic or social endeavor is dependent. Tenga Wende, his terrestrial manifestation, and Tido Wende, which gives life to the vegetable kingdom, are the aspects of Wennam which are most frequently evoked; but Siguiri Wende, the deified first ancestor of the Mossi; Ki Wende, the millet god; and Saga Wende, the rain deity, are also frequently called upon for help.

793 Each Mossi village in the Yatenga is divided into one or more areas,
[36] each of which is in the "command" of one of the village earth custodians. Each of these areas contains both the dwelling of the Savadogo lineage of the earth custodian and the residence and farmlands of various "true" Mossi lineages. The head of each lineage maintains the good will of the terrestrial manifestation of the deity through the intercession of the earth custodian who "commands" his land. In some instances a lineage may own land under the authority of two different earth custodians; in this case offerings must be made at the shrine (*tenga*) of each.

793 The good fortune which may be secured through obeisance to the
782 terrestrial manifestation of the deity (Tenga Wende) involves both sacrifices and gifts of money to the earth custodian and abstention from acts offensive to the earth. For example, sexual intercourse may take
[833 place only in a private courtyard or within the house. Violation of this
783] rule defiles the land and must be expiated through a special sacrifice and the payment of a fine to the earth custodian. Any lost object found in the
778 public way or in the bush is in the custody of the earth deity and must be turned over to the earth custodian to await the inquiry of the proper owners. If such objects are unclaimed, they are given to Tenga Wende

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by being placed on his altar, where they become part of the earth symbols (*tiinse*). As a result, these altars are piled high with old sardine cans, bicycle parts, remnants of clothing, unusual stones and scraps of metal, baskets, wooden implements, and weapons, which are left there to decompose slowly and return to the earth. Travelers in a strange village need never fear that their property will be stolen if they deposit it near the altar of the earth custodian.

When a farmer wishes to clear a part of the bush which has previously been unused, he must first ask permission of the earth custodian and make a present to the earth deity. If he wishes to use the land again the following year, the request and the gift must be repeated. Such a field may be passed on to his descendants, who have a right to the land so long as they acknowledge each year the authority of the earth custodian. If a new well is to be dug, his authorization must be requested, and his advice may also be asked for the proper place to seek water. The wise Mossi farmer consults the earth custodian frequently about his agricultural activities. He also reports anything that he may have done to alter the condition of his farmlands or the surrounding bush, not because each individual act is of such great importance, but because maintaining good relations with the custodian of the earth is in the interest of his own economic security.

### OTHER ASPECTS OF RELIGION

Other descendants of the original inhabitants of the Yatenga, the Bogoba, are especially charged with the propitiation of Tido Wendé, the vegetal manifestation of Wennam. In addition to the many manifestations of Wennam and the complex organization of priests and ceremonial designed for his propitiation, many other forces inhabit the unseen world of the Mossi. Indeed, to the observer their number and variety might at first seem to be almost as great as the number of Mossi with whom he may discuss these beings. Each man's description of these supernatural beings varies in terms of his subjective reaction resulting either from direct experience of them or from stories he has heard concerning their behavior. In contrast to Wennam, whose disposition is essentially benevolent so long as he is properly propitiated, these lesser supernatural beings are more frequently malicious and always more difficult to control. Perhaps for these reasons they are not worshiped. The Mossi's concern is not to propitiate them but to neutralize their evil intentions by the use of protective charms (*tim*).

The "bush," the unused land lying beyond the farms, is the least-known aspect of the Mossi natural environment. This is especially true of those far areas of the bush where even the authority of the earth custodians does not extend and where unknown spirits dwell. For although the

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bush is included in the orderly universe which the Mossi have fabricated, it exists at the periphery and is a thing to be feared. The name of this unknown and unowned part of the bush is synonymous with fear. Dreams in which an individual sees frightening images are called "bush creeping up" (*weogo doore*) or "bush traps you" (*weogo n'yoko fo*). These phrases are also used to describe the emotional shock, the feeling of fear, elicited by the unexpected sight of a frightening object like a corpse or a lion.

Most important among the supernatural beings inhabiting the bush are the twin spirits (*kikirdisi*). Living in pairs or in larger groups, they inhabit the bush, caves, baobab trees, and certain dense thickets of underbrush. While specific details vary, it is generally conceded that they are small, about a foot tall, black like the Mossi, and of both sexes. Their social organization is like that of men: each group is ruled over by a twin spirit-chief (*Kikirdisi Naba*).

Twin children are always regarded as the emissaries of the twin spirits. Shortly after the birth of twins their mother takes a present of food to a place where the twin spirits are known to dwell. Leaving the gift and expressing her thanks, she also makes it clear to the twin spirits that if they have any sort of malicious intent in sending her their children they might as well take them back immediately, since she will tolerate no foolishness. If, through her new children, they plan to torment her, they should save their efforts and desist at once. While the twin spirits are frequently mischief-makers, they are more frivolous than malicious and essentially neither good nor evil. The death of newborn twins is accepted with relief, for it is believed certain that the twin spirits have been thwarted in their mischievous intent and have conceded defeat.

### THE ECONOMIC AND CEREMONIAL CYCLE

A brief description of the economic cycle and the ceremonials which mark its phases will serve to illustrate the way the Mossi perceive their relationship to the forces of their natural, supernatural, and social milieux and the methods by which they seek to assure their well-being through control of these forces. The year is usually divided into twelve moons whose names refer either to the principal economic activity of the season or to a ceremonial which accompanies it.

The first moon of the Mossi year is called "Gambo" after the name of the village which celebrates its first rain-making ceremony (*Tengana*) at this time. Although the rains are still five or six months away, this ritual marks the beginning of the new economic cycle. Each household which possesses land controlled by the earth custodian sends one of its young girls with an offering of millet gruel to place at the altar of Tenga Wende, the terrestrial manifestation of the deity. The earth custodian advises

Tenga Wende of the desire for a good growing year and gives each girl a small part of the wet earth near the shrine; this represents the now sanctified soul (*shiga*) and is placed under the granary from which the millet seeds for the new crop will be taken.

Then those who possess land controlled by the earth custodian organize a hunt for his benefit. The following day, the earth custodian visits each lineage which possesses fields in areas of the bush under his custodianship. He is given calabashes filled with millet gruel, which he pours as a libation on the earth, asking Tenga Wende to grant good health, heavy rains, and a successful harvest to the household. As the libation is poured, the women try to catch a little in their own calabashes of gruel, which they then pour as their sacrifice. Because the millet from the granaries of good harvests is lucky, other women want to try to catch a little of it in their own offerings; thus the libations spill from one calabash into another as they fall on the earth.

The second moon is called "Bega" after the ceremonial which coincides with the first labor in the fields, the clearing and burning which precedes planting. After making a sacrifice at his own altar, the earth custodian goes to the residence of the neighboring priest (*Boga*) specifically charged with the propitiation of the vegetal manifestation of the deity. This visit symbolizes the interdependent relationship of the two priests and the supernatural powers which they control. The *Boga* then repeats the libations made during the previous ritual, but this time the offerings of millet gruel are made to Tido Wende, the force which gives life to the plants, rather than to the earth.

A sacrifice to Pogo Wende, the specific manifestation of Tenga Wende which guards a farmer's fields, is usually made after they have been cleared and prepared for planting. Either before or after the sowing of the first seeds, the farmer asks the earth custodian to sacrifice a sheep or a goat to the field deity, requesting good health, heavy rains, and a rich harvest. This sacrifice (*Pogo Mande*) is the final aspect of the ceremonial preparations for the new economic cycle. It is designed to enlist the benevolence not only of Pogo Wende but also of the twin spirits which inhabit the field. If the twins are well disposed toward the farmer, they will protect the soul (*ki shiga*) of his millet stand from the twin spirits from neighboring fields who might try to steal it. Like the ancestral spirits, the twin spirits send a high wind into a field, blowing the ripening grains from the stalk and liberating their "souls" (*shiise*), which are then captured to enrich the spirits' own fields.

The third moon of the year is called "Cundiba Bega." The fourth, which usually corresponds with the European month of June, is called "unaccompanied" (Quizale), referring to the fact that no ceremonial is observed during its phase. The hard work in the fields is begun at this

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time. "Waraga," which means "first cultivation," is the name given to the fifth. The sixth, which appears in early September or late August, is called "Baca," meaning "second cultivation."

If the millet is not yet ripe for harvest at the appearance of the seventh moon, it is also called "Baca," since the work of cultivation must continue. This choice rests with the chief of the village of Room. The entire Mossi kingdom waits for his decision to know whether the ceremonial cycle called "Basga," which closes the economic year, is to begin or whether the harvest and its attendant ceremonies are to be put off for another month. Just behind his residence is a sacred millet field whose grains, as they mature, contain an aspect of the souls (*riim shiise*) of the dead kings of the Yatenga. When the millet in this field is ready to be cut, the next moon to appear is called "Yalem," and the ceremonial cycle which closes the economic year is begun. In the early days of the Yatenga dynasty millet from this field was used to prepare a sacrificial gruel to propitiate the deceased rulers of the newly established kingdom. When it is cut today, a first portion is taken to the altar at Room dedicated to the souls of these early kings. Two other bundles of millet are prepared from the same field. One is sent to the *Yatenga Naba* at Ouahigouya, who is the living descendant of the dead kings. The other is sent to the village of Gourcy, the former capital and the first residence of the founder of the Yatenga dynasty, Naba Yadiga.

The emissaries to the two political centers are accompanied by young people who break off stalks of millet from the fields along their way, adding these to the bundles of grain so as to include all of the farmers of the Yatenga in this offering which symbolizes the dependence of the Mossi on the benevolence of the souls of the dead kings and their living descendant. The millet taken to Ouahigouya is sacrificed at the palace altar of the former rulers. Part of the millet sent to Gourcy is sacrificed at the altar of the spirits of the former village chiefs (*nakom shiise*); the other part is sacrificed at the shrine of the former kings. At Ouahigouya and Gourcy a portion of each sacrificial offering of millet is returned to Room with stalks from the local crop at each place. These are used to make a final sacrifice symbolizing the interdependent relationship of Mossi religious, economic, and political organizations. The ceremonial cycle serves to demonstrate the reliance of the people on the benevolence of the spirits of their former kings for their social, economic, and supernatural well-being.

A ceremony called "Kom Filiga" follows. Meaning "water thanksgiving," it is the occasion for thanking the Mossi ruler, the *Yatenga Naba*, for the wise direction of affairs which has permitted the farmers to cultivate their fields in peace. All village and canton chiefs travel to Ouahigouya to salute their king and rededicate themselves to his service.

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The next moon, called "Tido," is the occasion for a ceremony thanking Wennam, through his terrestrial and vegetal manifestations, for his support during the growing season and for the rich harvests that have been received. Though it is directed by the custodians of the earth, it is their auxiliaries, the Bogaba, who officiate and who sacrifice at the altars to Tido Wende. After they have finished, others may offer a chicken as thanks for successful harvests or for the birth of a child.

At the appearance of the next moon the ceremony called "Filiga" is celebrated, thanking the ancestors of each lineage for their protection during the hard months of the rainy season. The initial sacrifices are made by the village chief both at the shrine to the spirits of the former chiefs and at the ancestral shrine of his lineage. Because their offerings are made to powerful spirits, it is wiser not to refer directly to them by name. They are called *Kikirigo Na Maore*, which means "twin dance." The twin spirits, like the ancestral spirits (*kienise*), give children. Thus, through indirection a "charged" word is avoided by calling the sacrifice after an analogous but less powerful force. The specific purpose of the first sacrifice is to ask the protection and the assistance of the spirits of the former chiefs during the dangerous period which is to follow. The ancestral spirits of the villagers are then propitiated, and individuals who fail to perform the sacrifices properly may be punished by their ancestors. It is also believed that the ancestors may try to call some of the members of the lineage to join them at this time.

The sacrifices are made by the children of the daughters of the lineage (*Yasenamba*), whose permissive relationship with their mother's kinsmen is paralleled by their relationship to the ancestral spirits of their lineage. The lineage head presents the first chicken for sacrifice. Its throat is slowly cut as it is offered to the "twin" (*kikirigo*), as the "first ancestor" of the lineage is called—again through indirection, for even if the name of the first ancestor were known, it would be presumptuous of his descendants to call him by name. A chicken is then sacrificed to the "old ancestors" of the great-grandfather's generation, to the ancestors of the grandfather's generation, and to those of the fathers' generation who are deceased. As each chicken's throat is cut, the ancestors are thanked for their protection throughout the rainy season and requested to continue to look out for the welfare of their descendants during the months of the dry season which follow. Other men of the lineage may then give chickens to be sacrificed.

The final aspect of the ritual closing of the economic year is the ceremony called "Na Poosum," or "chief's salutation." It is essentially a social occasion. The homage to the central political authority made at Kom Filiga is now complemented on the village level. The elders of each lineage go to the village chief with presents of millet and assurances of

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their continued reliance upon his political power and intercession with his noble ancestors, in order that the village may enjoy peace through the coming months of the dry season and early rains at the beginning of the next economic cycle.

With this observance all of the sources of power—both social and supernatural—upon which the Mossis' well-being is dependent have been thanked for their support throughout the year just ended and have been encouraged, by the generosity of their supplicants, to continue their benevolence for the year to come. The Mossi understand the nature of these forces and the manner in which they can be controlled. They know them as manifestations of a deity who will reward their observance of ceremonial obligations with the soft winds and heavy rains that bring a rich harvest. The individual is intellectually and emotionally absorbed in maintaining a balance in his relationship to a world he understands. His efforts to maintain this balance are occasionally frustrated by sorcery or the contrary will of his deity, but he enjoys, nonetheless, a very real security.

### CULTURAL ADJUSTMENTS AT THE NIGER IRRIGATION PROJECT

Given the nature of these interrelationships between the organization of economic activity and the social and religious institutions of their culture, the adjustment of the Mossi who have been resettled at the Niger Irrigation Project has implications which go beyond mere technological adaptation. The settlers must, in fact, adjust to a totally changed cultural setting.

Arriving at the Niger project, they fail to find the institutions upon which they have always depended for their security; they find instead a natural environment governed by forces they do not know. Their water supply is no longer dependent on the supernatural controls of the earth custodians but comes from a dam built by Europeans. They are socially isolated from their kinsmen and their ancestral spirits in the Yatenga, and they derive little comfort from the presence of fellow Mossi with whom they have neither consanguineal nor affinal relationship.

Settlers were forcibly recruited for the Niger Irrigation Project until 1944, when forced labor was abolished throughout the French Union. Now a recruitment program brings Mossi families to the project each year; every family head receives a house, oxen, a plow, and a plot of land proportionate to the number of active workers accompanying him. Under the supervision of European agronomists, they apply modern methods to the production of rice and cotton. The project administration buys their crop for cash after deducting fees for seed, irrigation, mechanized cultivation, transportation, and processing. In theory, ten years of

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debt-free cultivation entitle the settler to permanent residence on the land he has been loaned.

Adaptation to the conditions of the new geographical setting in which the Mossi find themselves has been relatively rapid and easy. The Yatenga and the Niger project lie within the same climatic zone; the only important ecological difference between the two areas is the increased water supply resulting from irrigation. This change in the origin of the water supply, control of which provides a basic sanction of Mossi religion, was less disturbing to traditional belief than might have been anticipated.

Rather than diminishing their belief in their own religion, it only convinces the Mossi colonists that the forces of the natural order are different in their new habitat and accordingly must be controlled in a different way. Finding the indigenous inhabitants of the French Sudan, the Bambara, to be zealous Moslems, the Mossi settlers have accepted Islam as the religion of their new country. Confident that their religious obligations in the Yatenga will be taken care of by the elders who have remained behind, and with some pressure from those who have already become Moslemized, new arrivals rapidly embrace Islam as the system by which the supernatural forces governing their new environment can be manipulated.

Their acceptance of Islam has been as superficial as it has been rapid. There is time neither for the study of Moslem theology nor for the soul-searching which must precede the rejection of previously held religious beliefs. With a tradition which emphasizes the observance of religious form rather than intense emotional participation in ceremonial, their observance of the five daily prayers, taking of a Moslem name, deference to the marabout, and casual attention to certain dietary prohibitions should be viewed as their rational reaction to the fact of being in a strange land with an obviously different supernatural order which must be dealt with in a new way. Desire for a measure of control over this new supernatural order, pressure for conformity to the religious norms of their new social setting, and—perhaps most significantly—the permissiveness which characterizes the West African's acceptance of the existence of new supernatural forces, makes Islamization possible without the rejection of previously held religious ideas or practices.

In contrast to the relative ease of their adaptation to the natural and supernatural aspects of their new environment, their adjustment to the social situations which result from the change in economic organization has been most difficult. They must, of course, learn a new technology: the cultivation of rice and cotton by modern methods. Since the machines used for clearing the land and for the harvest are operated by

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177 241 specially trained non-Mossi personnel, the use of irrigation, fertilizer, and the plow are their most important technological innovations. Despite their difficulty in communicating with the European agronomists under whose direction they work, they soon master these agricultural techniques. Patterns of consumption are also altered, rice taking the [261] place of millet as the staple in their diet. After some initial illness they become accustomed to rice but suspect that it is less nourishing than their traditional diet.

177 182 Far more difficult than adjusting to either the new technology or the diet is adaptation to the changed social organization. Trying to ease this adjustment but with an imperfect understanding of traditional Mossi institutions, the project administration has tried to re-create their forms in the area of resettlement.

Despite this, the new colonist finds himself isolated among social forces he does not understand. The attempt to reproduce the traditional pattern of residential grouping is meaningless in the absence of the lineage. Separated from his kinsmen and his community, the colonist is confused by social institutions whose resemblance to those he has known in the Yatenga exists only on the level of form. He does not like or understand being housed with strangers as if they were his kinsmen. Equally incomprehensible is an approximation of the familiar political organization which, ignoring the traditional sanctions of chieftainship, has a former earth custodian, whose supernatural role has traditionally precluded the exercise of political authority, as paramount chief.

Despite the efforts of the European administration to reproduce their structural appearance, the institutions of Mossi society are so interrelated that the change in the organization of economic activity has created new needs which make alterations in traditional institutions inevitable. Rather than permitting the colonists to modify their indigenous social organization to fit these new needs, the social structure rigidly imposed by the Europeans has impeded the Mossi in their efforts to adjust their institutions to the changed situation. The delegation of authority to inept administrative appointees thinly disguised as chiefs and to the older, least adaptive members of the settler communities only complicates the problem of adjustment.

Isolated from their kinsmen and the protection of their ancestral spirits, the colonists miss the emotional and social satisfactions of extended family living as well as the security of an established position in the community in which they were born. Adherence to the traditional kinship organization, with its emphasis on obedience to the elders who [582] have remained behind in the Yatenga, makes marriage at the Niger project almost impossible.

The young men born and raised at the project resent the tradition

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which requires sharing and compliance with the authority of kinsmen in the Yatenga whom they have never known. Forced to return to the Yatenga to assist the extended family there, they are frustrated in their efforts to form a permanent identification with their residence at the irrigation project. More efficient than their elders in communicating with the Europeans and in learning their techniques, they are thwarted by a social organization which denies expression to their initiative. The older men, given no share in the administration of the project and with little understanding of its objectives, believe that they are being exploited by the Europeans and that they would be more successful if they were to follow their own system of production and marketing.

The Mossi have learned that the official policy of the Niger Irrigation Project specifies their participation in administration through "indigenous agricultural associations," and even through their "collaboration" within the board of directors; but they do not actually participate in either of these. Possibly the fact that the Mossi have had no previous experience of participation in democratic forms discouraged the Europeans in their early efforts to include them in the administration of the project, but such participation implies a profound cultural adjustment and would require patience on the part of the Europeans. Whatever the case, the fact that the colonists know they have a right to participate in the administration and yet are denied it only serves to increase their conviction that they are being exploited.

Unsure of their rights to the land, unaware of the goals of the project, and inhibited by their artificially maintained tradition from forming meaningful social relationships in the area of resettlement, the Mossi make little permanent identification with the Niger project and its objectives. They say that it is like the hut a man builds in his fields during the rainy season; when the crop is harvested, he will return to the house of his fathers.

The relatively rapid and easy adaptation to the new natural setting and the supernatural forces which govern it is probably due both to the lack of European interference in this aspect of the colonists' lives and to the traditional permissiveness of West African religions. On the other hand, the greatest obstacle to adjustment seems to be just that aspect of the changed situation which was designed to facilitate it: the reconstruction and artificial maintenance of a social structure which cannot be efficiently integrated with the new economic organization. This structure has been maintained with such rigidity that it actually impedes Mossi efforts to reinterpret their institutions in terms of their new situation.

The Mossi who have returned from the Niger project have had little effect on their kinsmen in the Yatenga. Islamized colonists are often

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177 too young to be listened to seriously by their elders. If they are returning
182 as senior members of their lineages, and since their power and prestige
561 are dependent on the maintenance of the socio-religious status quo, they are unlikely to be innovators. For these same reasons the few changes in the social organization which have occurred at the Niger project have had little effect on the social environment of the Yatenga.

177 Most of the agricultural techniques acquired in the Sudan are useless
241 in the Yatenga because of the absence of irrigation. Even were this not so, the rationale of the modern agricultural methods employed at the Niger project is not explained to the settlers; they are required to follow the instructions of the European agronomists or be penalized. As a result, the improved agricultural techniques of the Europeans are regarded as just another of the white man's incomprehensible ways and are quickly forgotten.

177 The response of the Mossi to resettlement at the Niger Irrigation
182 Project shows that in a situation of rapid cultural change, retentions or changes on the superficial level of form are misleading; nor is a brief statement of the functional interrelationship between institutions sufficient. The final reality of an institution lies in its meaning for the members of the society in which it exists, and its final evaluation must be based on its capacity to fulfil the changing needs of individuals. This concept is essential to an understanding of the colonists' dissatisfaction with the effort of the Niger project administration to reproduce artificially a static model of their traditional social structure. This can also be seen in their reaction to a changed supernatural order; an analysis which failed to descend beneath the level of form would miss the significant fact that their psychological response to religion and the basic premises of their theology have remained unaffected by an "Islamization" which amounts to little more than adopting certain new propitiatory usages.

Apparently not understanding the interrelationship of cultural institutions and the sanctions which give them meaning, the administration of the Niger Irrigation Project sought to modify the Mossi organization of economic activity without referring to the traditional values to which it is vitally related. Seeming to regard the indigenous culture as little more than a compendium of savage rites upon which superior European usages need only be imposed in order to prevail, such an approach reveals a failure to comprehend both the complexity and the tenacity of the Mossi cultural heritage.